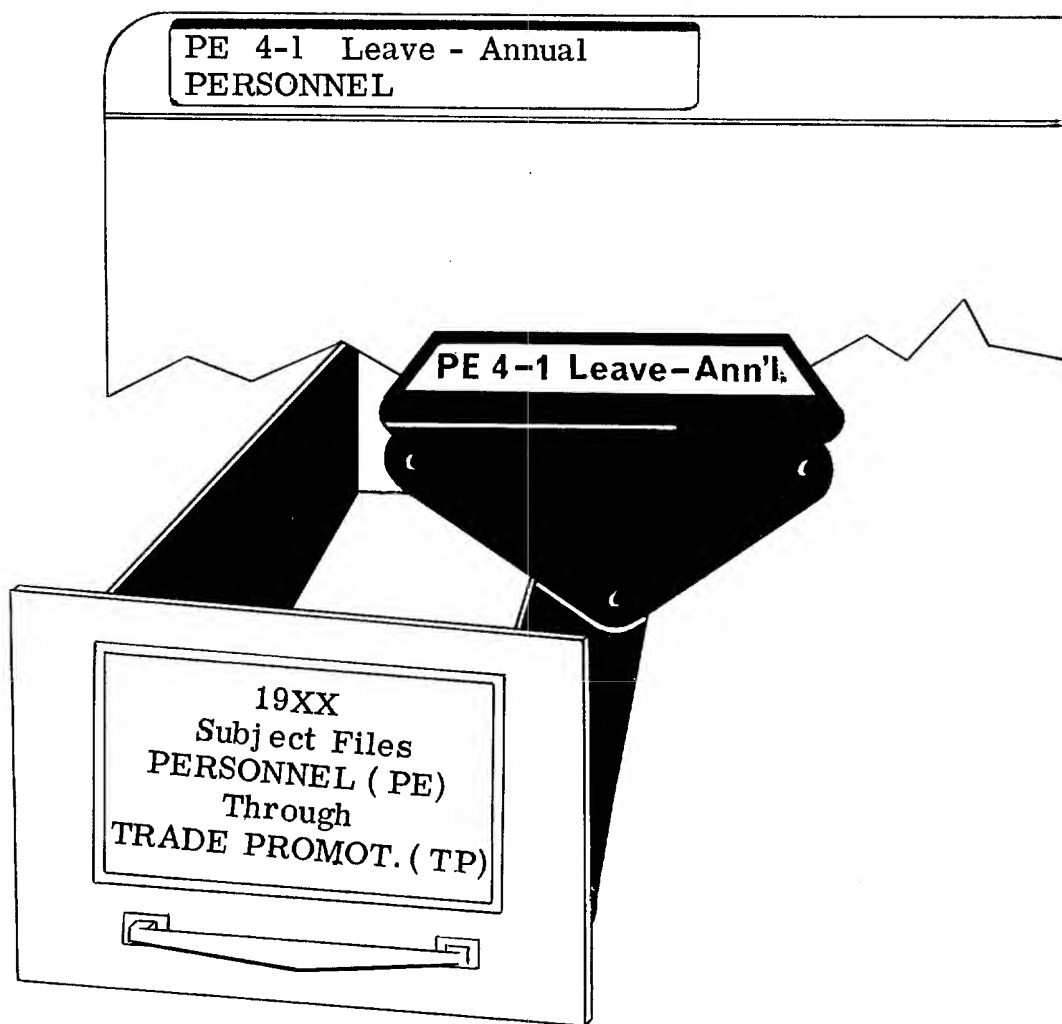


# CHECKLIST

00005R000100020006-6  
for appraising  
files operations  
in your office



GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

JANUARY 1968

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Approved For Release 2001/05/08 : CIA-RDP74-00005R000100020006-6

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, D.C., 20402 - Price 20 cents

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## FOREWORD

This is a do-it-yourself booklet about your files.

It deals with matters that are quite important . . .  
with the kinds of files you have and how you maintain  
them.

That is why every question in this booklet was  
written with a sense of responsibility toward you, the  
"keeper-of-the-files. "

You will find that this booklet offers no magic formula  
for quick and easy success in operating files. But it will  
help you to know if you have the right information in your  
files, and if it is arranged for easy finding.

Doesn't that make it worth using?

## WHEN AND HOW TO USE THE CHECKLIST WHICH FOLLOWS

If you haven't studied your files operations for a year or more, you should do so as soon as you can. The questions on the following pages will help you.

You don't have to do this all at one time. The questions have been grouped so that you can answer them as other work permits. It is suggested, however, that you try to complete a group of these questions without prolonged interruption, as those within a group frequently are interrelated.

A review like this should be made once a year. It would be a good idea, therefore, for you to place a reminder about it in your follow-up file.

You will notice that, for your convenience, check boxes are provided for "yes" and "no" answers. Any check mark in the "no" column may indicate a need for corrective action.

Should you find that such action is necessary and that you need further written guidance, consult the records management publications of your agency. Should there be none of these or if they do not answer your need, the supplementary GSA-NARS publications listed at the end of this booklet may help you.

You should contact the records management office in your agency or its local representative if you need technical assistance. If your agency, commission, or committee has no such source to contact, assistance is available from GSA's National Archives and Records Service offices. A list of these is provided at the end of this booklet.

CHECKLIST FOR USE IN APPRAISING

FILES OPERATIONS

A. FILE LESS

YES NO

1. Does someone in my office determine whether or not given types of papers being created or received must be filed?

☐ ☐

General rule: In every office where files are maintained someone should make this determination; otherwise many papers will be filed which are not worth filing.

2. Does my office have a policy that the following materials are not to be filed-

-envelopes?

☐ ☐

-route slips on which there are no significant notations?

☐ ☐

-superseded drafts which show no important substantive changes?

☐ ☐

-duplicates of correspondence and reports other than those needed for cross-references?

☐ ☐

General rule: Every office should have a firm rule that such obviously unneeded papers will not be filed. This prevents wasted effort, filing space, and equipment, and makes needed papers easier to file and find.

3. Does my office have a policy that file copies of form letters will not be made in instances when (a) no retained record is necessary or (b) a notation on incoming correspondence showing the form reply used and the date will suffice or (c) one copy showing distribution will do?

☐ ☐

General rule: Such copies serve no purpose, increase the filing workload, clutter files, and so should not be made.

YES   NO

4. Does my office have policy governing which publications will or will not be filed?

☐   ☐

5. Are originators of publications requested to discontinue sending those no longer needed?

☐   ☐

General rule: These practices should be followed, because publications rapidly consume filing space and equipment, sometimes require indexing.

6. Does my office, in responding to purely routine correspondence ( such as requests for publications, applications, stereotyped inquiries, etc.) reply (a) on the incoming letter which is returned to the sender or (b) by form letter, printed slip or other ready-made answer, returning or discarding the incoming letter?

☐   ☐

General rule: Unless agency policy prohibits, one or more of these practices should be followed. They eliminate preparation of file copies of replies and filing of incoming letters.

## B. CLASSIFICATION AND FILING SYSTEM

1. Have I listed the subjects and types of records in my office?

☐   ☐

2. Have I compared my list with the subjects and types of records provided for in the filing manual prescribed for my use?

☐   ☐

3. Have I defined all subjects on my list which do not appear in the filing manual prescribed for my use?

☐   ☐

General rule: These actions should be taken as first, essential steps, if files are not already arranged according to authorized system.

YES   NO

4. Does the filing manual prescribed for my use adequately provide for the records of my office?

☐ ☐

General rule: When a filing manual developed for general use does not satisfactorily provide for the records of an office, that office should see that the manual is supplemented to fit local needs by contacting the agency records management office or its local representative.

5. Are the manual's subjects logically arranged in relation to the way my office operates?

☐ ☐

General rule: Subject outlines work best when they conform to the functions to which they pertain.

6. Do I usually find it rather easy to select the subject under which a paper should be filed (i. e., there are not too many subjects under which a given paper can go)?

☐ ☐

General rule: A good filing manual avoids providing an excessive number of subjects from which to choose in deciding where to file a paper. This in turn improves likelihood that all papers on the same subject will be consistently filed and found together.

7. Are the manual's instructions and definitions complete and clear?

☐ ☐

General rule: A good filing manual provides clear instructions, definitions, and references not only as general guidance on how to use the manual but also wherever they are needed in connection with subjects.

YES   NO

8. Are the coding symbols which represent subjects short, simple, and easy to remember?

☐   ☐

General rule: They should be, to make the marking, sorting, filing, and finding of papers fast, easy, accurate.

9. Are my files actually arranged in accordance with the manual prescribed for my use?

☐   ☐

General rule: They should be, unless the manual is believed unsuitable for the office's files, in which event the agency records management office or its local representative should be contacted.

### C. CLASSIFYING PRACTICES

1. Do I assemble directly related papers (e. g., incoming letter and copy of outgoing reply) before determining their file designation?

☐   ☐

General rule: By assembling directly related papers, more information is available on which to make a sound decision on the correct file designation.

2. Do I mark papers with their file designations (e. g., underlining or check-marking name, writing file code in corner, etc.)?

☐   ☐

General rule: Papers should be so marked to make it unnecessary to re-read a paper when filing it or returning it to file.

3. When I am in doubt regarding the right file designation for a paper do I refer to an index to the files, to papers already filed so as to verify or reject a tentative choice, or ask the opinion of officials who are acquainted with the subject, case, or project?

☐   ☐

General rule: These steps, in the order given should be taken, rather than to guess.



YES   NO

4. Do my superiors or other officials refrain from marking file designations on papers before sending them to me to file?

☐   ☐

General rule: If you are held responsible for finding papers when they are asked for, you should at least participate in deciding how to file them. This is true even if (a) the filing system was devised by a superior and he understands it best; (b) he is intimately acquainted with the technical content of papers and so feels best qualified to mark them for filing; or (c) he feels that certain papers are so important that he wants to be certain he knows where they are in the files so he can produce them quickly.

#### D. FINDING AIDS

1. Are all of the indexes and other finding aids I have really worth the time, effort, and cost of preparing and maintaining them?

☐   ☐

General rule: All finding aids are costly and, therefore, should be held to a minimum. Several types of indexes to one kind of file system is a sign of weakness in that system.

2. When a paper covers more than one subject, name, etc., do I provide cross-references only for the additional subjects or names by which I feel the paper is likely to be requested?

☐   ☐

General rule: Cross-referencing should be restricted to just those which experience has proven are useful. Resist the temptation to cross-reference every subject, name, etc., in a paper.

YES   NO

3. When a cross-reference is needed, do I use an extra carbon copy or obtain a "quick-copy" of the paper involved?

☐ ☐

General rule: A copy of the paper is preferable to the preparation of a cross-reference form, because it provides the full text of the paper and is usually faster and cheaper to obtain.

4. Do I mark each copy to show (a) that it is a cross-reference, (b) where it should be filed, and (c) where the paper from which it was copied is filed?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done to clearly identify the nature and purpose of the copy and location of the paper copied.

#### E. FILING PRACTICES

1. When officials release papers to me for filing, do they initial or otherwise mark them to show that their filing is authorized?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should always be done; otherwise there is no assurance that a paper has been seen or acted on.

2. Do I sort papers which are ready to be filed, into the same sequence as the files in which they will be placed?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done. It prevents backtracking and thus saves filing time and effort.

3. Do I fasten papers together which will be asked for as a group?

☐ ☐

YES   NO

4. Do I leave papers unfastened which will be asked for singly?

☐ ☐

General rule: Whether or not to fasten papers should be governed by the way papers are asked for. The perforating of papers, placing them on fasteners, opening and closing fasteners, etc., are tedious, time consuming operations. For these reasons, papers should be fastened only when entire folders are requested.

5. Are my files arranged according to the way they are asked for?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be so, as far as it can be carried, because it makes finding much easier.

6. Have I arranged as many papers as possible into case or project files?

☐ ☐

7. Do I clearly understand what constitutes the essential papers which belong in each kind of case or project file, so I can tell when such a file is complete?

☐ ☐

8. When a case or project is closed, do I remove the file from among those of still active cases or projects and place it with the files of other closed cases or projects?

☐ ☐

General rule: Papers should be arranged into case or project files, if possible, as this is the simplest way to file and find information. Recurrent, repetitive kinds of information which belongs in a case or project file should be known to those who maintain such files. Closed files should be separated from active ones.

YES   NO

9. Is file material separated or identified in some way to-

-show its age, so that it will be easy to dispose of or retire at scheduled times?

☐   ☐

-distinguish that of permanent or long-term value from that of transitory value?

☐   ☐

-keep heavily used material from being mixed with and encumbered by seldom used material?

☐   ☐

-keep files designated as "official files" apart from those which have not been so designated?

☐   ☐

10. If so, is this done in one or more of the following ways-

-by maintaining material in (a) separate filing cabinets, drawers, or sections of drawers or (b) separate shelves or sections of shelves, with inclusive dates shown on drawer, shelf, or guide card labels?

☐   ☐

-by maintaining material in separate file folders, with inclusive dates or values shown on folder tabs?

☐   ☐

-color coding to show periods of time or values of papers; e. g., yellow label for the current period or for permanent papers, green label for the preceding period or temporary papers, etc. ?

☐   ☐

-by dividing material within file folders to separate permanent from temporary or to separate heavily used from seldom used material?

☐   ☐

-by affixing clip-on signals to file folders, using different colors or positions to indicate time periods?

☐   ☐

-by using staggered positions of file folder tabs to indicate retention periods and methods of disposition?

☐   ☐

YES   NO

**General rule:** Separation of papers for one or more of the purposes listed above should be done, as far as practicable. The method used must depend on the amount, kind, etc., of papers, and the advice of the agency records management officer should be requested to help arrive at the right selection in each instance.

11. Are my files neat and orderly in appearance, with file folder and guide card tabs aligned in simple patterns which are easy to scan when locating files?

☐ ☐

**General rule:** Uncluttered, simple arrangement of folder and guide tabs and clear, standardized labeling of such tabs are definite aids to filing and finding papers.

12. Are the contents of my file folders and/or containers limited in volume so as to avoid overloading them?

☐ ☐

**General rule:** Overloading should be avoided, as it makes filing and finding difficult and can damage papers.

13. Are my files virtually free of empty or nearly empty file folders?

☐ ☐

**General rule:** Only folders for which there is a present or expected need should be established.

14. Is there the right number of file guide cards (dividers) in my files?

☐ ☐

**General rule:** The number of guide cards needed will vary somewhat, due to the number and thickness of file folders, whether the files are subject, name, or number files, etc. It is better to have too few than too many, as too many actually slow filing and finding.

YES   NO

15. Do all file drawer or shelf file labels clearly identify the files involved?

☐   ☐

General rule: When such labels identify contents of cabinet drawers or shelving sections, filing and finding is expedited.

16. If I have an alphabetical name file of persons or organizations, do I provide for name changes by refiling the papers involved under the new name?

☐   ☐

General rule: This should be done, as requests will most likely mention new name. (See also next question).

17. If name file papers are refilled under a new name is a cross-reference placed under the old name referring to the new one?

☐   ☐

General rule: This should be done, since some requests may mention only old name.

18. When I have bulky or oversized file material which cannot be suitably placed with my regular file material, do I (a) mark it with the appropriate file designation and identification of the particular letter, report, etc., to which it relates and (b) place it in other equipment suited to its size?

☐   ☐

General rule: These steps should be taken, for reasons which are obvious. (see also next question).

19. If I place bulky material apart from my regular files, do I indicate on the related letter, report, etc., in the regular files where the bulky material has been placed?

☐   ☐

General rule: This should be done, for reasons which are obvious.

YES   NO

20. When I must remove papers from an earlier group of files to combine them with current papers, do I replace the earlier papers with a cross-reference showing their new location?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done; otherwise whereabouts of earlier papers is uncertain.

21. Do I maintain a suspense (tickler, reminder) file on  
(a) correspondence to which replies are due or on which action should be taken by a given date or  
(b) files needed by someone on a predetermined date?

☐ ☐

General rule: Such a file is extremely useful, and should be established if supervisor approves.

22. Do I regularly straighten and tamp down papers in folders, crease expansion folds (scoring) on bottom of folders to keep papers from hiding labels, and check for misfiles?

☐ ☐

General rule: These practices should, of course, be followed to make files easier to use and to ensure that papers are where they belong.

23. Do I remove paperclips, rubber bands, spring clips, and pins from papers, and staple those which should be stapled before filing?

☐ ☐

General rule: These actions should be taken to prevent papers being inadvertently attached to others or separated as clips slip off, and to reduce bulk.

24. Do I keep my current files free of records which should be disposed of according to authorized agency schedules?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done to the fullest practicable extent, to save filing space and equipment, making filing and finding easier.

YES   NO

25. Do I periodically dispose of records (by retirement or destruction as authorized) according to schedules provided by my agency records management office?

☐ ☐

General rule: These things should be done, to save filing space and equipment and make filing and finding easier.

26. Do I file security-classified papers in separate file containers from papers not security-classified or papers marked "For Official Use Only"?

☐ ☐

General rule: This practice should be followed. However, in most agencies, security regulations permit filing unclassified papers with classified ones when they are needed together for reference purposes. Such interfiling should be restricted to papers which directly support, explain, or document a decision or transaction. Be sure to check this point with your agency records management office or its local representative.

#### F. REFERENCE SERVICE

1. When records are removed from my files for use are they replaced by a charge-out form?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done, unless the users are in the same room or within a very limited distance from your files, so that location of records is known.

2. When additional papers arrive for inclusion in a file that is charged out, do I take these additional papers to the person who has the file?

☐ ☐

General rule: This should be done, so that he will have the benefit of the additional information.



YES   NO

3. Do I periodically contact persons to whom files are charged, after a reasonable period of time, to see if files can be returned?

☐   ☐

General rule: This should be done, to make these files available to other persons, lessen chance of their being misplaced.

4. Over a period of, say, one year, would the total "can't finds" in my file be less than 3%?

☐   ☐

General rule: Three percent is regarded as the break-off point between efficient and inefficient reference service.

## G. WORKLOAD

1. Do I keep my classifying and filing up-to-date?

☐   ☐

General rule: Classifying and filing should, of course, be kept-up-to-date; that is, done daily, so that backlogs do not accumulate. If this is not possible because the volume of papers is too great or other duties are given priority, etc., this should be discussed with supervisor.

2. Am I able to attend to requests for files or information from files as such requests are received?

☐   ☐

General rule: Requests for files service should be handled when they are received, not backlogged. If this is not happening, determine cause and discuss with supervisor.

## H. DOCUMENTATION

1. Are my files complete, free of information gaps?

☐   ☐

2. Do other offices or organizations always supply information due my office (such as periodic reports, requested data, etc.)?

☐   ☐

YES   NO

3. Do other persons in my office always turn papers over to me for my files? ☐ ☐
4. Do other persons in my office always tell me when they remove papers from my files during my absence? ☐ ☐

General rule: Files should completely document, as far as possible, the office's role in a transaction, decision, project, etc. This is not possible if the answer to questions 2, 3, or 4 is "no," in which case you should consult your supervisor.

5. Do I fully understand regulations and procedures for the protection of security-classified files? ☐ ☐

General rule: All such policy and instructions must be thoroughly understood.

## I. EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

1. Am I using legal-size equipment and supplies only when the amount of legal-size papers is 20% or more? ☐ ☐

General rule: Because legal-size equipment and supplies cost more and take up more space, their use should be held to a practical minimum.

2. Am I using 5-drawer filing cabinets? ☐ ☐

General rule: These should be used when available and when modern shelving should not be used, because of their greater capacity and saving of floor space.

3. Have I explored the advantages of using modern shelving instead of filing cabinets? ☐ ☐

General rule: Unless there are strong reasons why they should not be used, such shelves offer benefits, particularly in floor space savings. Their use should be considered.

YES   NO

4. Am I using fire resistant insulated file equipment and security type file equipment only for records which require this protection?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Such equipment costs more than regular equipment, occupies more floor space, and is a greater floor load. It should be used only for records which warrant the degree of protection it affords.

5. Am I keeping filing cabinets free of stocks of blank forms, office supplies, stocks of publications, etc. ?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Filing cabinet space should not be wasted on such items. Materials of this kind should be stored in nearby supply cabinet, shelving, or other suitable housing.

6. Am I using the right kind of file folders?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Choice of folders should be governed by the kinds of papers, frequency of use, kind of container, etc., involved.

7. Am I using the right kind of file guide cards (dividers) ?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Here, too, choice should be based on the kind of file, the tab position prescribed, whether color coding is to be used, etc.

8. Am I using the right kind of file folder labels?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Pressure-sensitive (self-adhesive) labels are easiest to apply. Their size, color, and other features should be chosen according to the kind of file, amount of information on label, etc.

YES   NO

9. Do I use such aids as a sorter, hook-on shelves to hold papers as I file into containers, filing stool, tiered desk tray, etc. ?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Such devices make classifying, sorting, and filing easier. They should be used unless volume of papers is quite small.

#### J. SPACE AND WORKFLOW

1. Are my filing aids and file containers and their contents so arranged that steps are saved and filing moves progressively forward (e.g., from top to bottom of containers, left to right, etc.)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: They should be so arranged, so that filing can be accomplished with least effort and in least time.

2. Are file containers placed so that I can get to them easily?
3. Are they placed so they do not interfere with the flow of other work and movement of other personnel?
4. Are they placed so they do not expose files to damage?
5. Are they placed so they do not unnecessarily expose my files to unauthorized access?
6. Are they placed so they are not a safety hazard?
7. Are they placed so they are in an area of good light?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

General rule: Naturally, as many of these objectives should be realized as possible.

YES   NO

K. TRAINING

1. Does my agency (A) present files workshops or other files training courses or (B) encourage attendance at such courses when presented by other sources?

☐ ☐

2. If so, have I attended one recently (within the past two years)?

☐ ☐

**General rule:** Such courses should be given or supported, and be attended by all who maintain files. Only in this way can skills be improved, and the latest techniques, equipment, and supplies be introduced.

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FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE I SHOULD CONTACT THIS OFFICE IN MY  
AGENCY:

PERTINENT RECORDS MANAGEMENT PUBLICATIONS OF MY AGENCY:

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE  
OFFICES WHICH PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

( Contact if your agency has no records management office or local representative)

<u>GSA Region in Which You Are Located</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Telephone Number</u>
1	Post Office and Courthouse Boston, Massachusetts 02109	617 223-2695
2	30 Church Street New York, New York 10007	212 264-3514
3	National Archives Building 7th & Pennsylvania Ave., N. W. Washington, D. C. 20408	202 962-3512 (IDS Code 13)
4	1776 Peachtree Street, N. W. Atlanta, Georgia 30309	404 526-5611
5	219 South Dearborn Street Chicago, Illinois 60604	312 828-5674
6	1500 East Bannister Road Kansas City, Missouri 64131	816 361-7274
7	819 Taylor Street Fort Worth, Texas 76102	817 334-2759
8	Building 41, Denver Federal Center Denver, Colorado 80225	303 233-8339
9	49 Fourth Street San Francisco, California 94103	415 556-3425
10	6125 Sand Point Way Seattle, Washington 98115	206 583-4500

PERTINENT GSA-NARS PUBLICATIONS:

Records Management Handbooks

Files Operations

Subject Filing

Form Letters

Applying Records Schedules

Pamphlets

Standard Shelf Files